

What is claimed is:

1. A method for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:
  - 5 screening fresh peppers, removing the stems of the peppers, and aging the peppers;
  - washing the peppers to remove foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers;
  - 10 optionally sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers using a chemical sterilant solution;
  - cutting and separating seeds from the washed or sterilized peppers;
  - sterilizing the cut peppers using a chemical sterilant solution and/or high-temperature and high-pressure steam;
  - drying the sterilized peppers by hot air or freeze-drying; and
  - grinding the dried peppers into a product.
- 15 2. The method of claim 1, before or after aging, after cutting and separating the seeds from the peppers, or after hot air drying, further comprising deep-freezing and storing the peppers.
- 20 3. The method of claim 2, wherein deep-freezing and storing the peppers is performed at a temperature of -25 to -40°C for at least 24 hours.
- 25 4. The method of claim 1, wherein sterilizing the surfaces of the peppers is performed with a 0.1-0.5% sodium dichloroisocyanurate solution for at least 1 minute.
- 30 5. The method of claim 1, wherein sterilizing the peppers using the chemical sterilant solution is performed with a 0.4-1.0% sodium dichloroisocyanurate solution for at least 30 seconds.
6. The method of claim 1, wherein sterilizing the peppers using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam is performed at a temperature of 90-120°C for 1-10 minutes.

7. The method of claim 1, wherein, when sterilizing the peppers is sequentially performed using the chemical sterilant solution and the high-temperature and high-pressure steam, sterilization using the chemical sterilant solution is performed using a 0.1-0.5% sodium dichloroisocyanurate solution for 5-20 minutes and sterilization using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam is performed at a temperature of 90-120°C for 2-10 minutes.

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8. The method of claim 1, between sterilization using the chemical sterilant solution and sterilization using the high-temperature and high-pressure steam, further comprising mixing the sterilized peppers with a sugar solution.

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9. The method of claim 8, wherein the sugar solution comprises 30-60% by weight of trehalose, 10-40% by weight of dextrin, and 10-40% by weight of purified water, and the sugar solution is added in an amount of 1-10 kg per 20 kg 15-  
peppers.

10. The method of claim 1, wherein drying the sterilized peppers by hot air comprises a first drying performed at a temperature of 90-110°C and a second drying performed at a temperature of 60-95°C.

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11. The method of claim 1, wherein drying the sterilized peppers by freeze-drying is performed at a temperature of 45-70°C for 18-23 hours in a freeze dryer after deep-freezing the sterilized peppers.

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12. The method of claim 1, further comprising:  
detecting and separating foreign materials from the dried peppers using a laser before grinding the dried peppers; and  
separating iron particles from the peppers after grinding the dried peppers.

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13. An apparatus for hygienically preparing dried peppers by continuous sterilization and drying processes, comprising:  
an aging room for screening fresh peppers and aging screened peppers to enhance flavor and color of the peppers;

a washer for washing foreign materials and pesticide residue from the surfaces of the peppers with water;

an optional chemical sterilizer for sterilizing the surfaces of the washed peppers;

5 a cutter for cutting the washed or sterilized peppers into pieces of a uniform size;

a seed separator for separating seeds from the cut peppers;

10 a chemical sterilizer and/or a high-temperature and high-pressure steam sterilizer for sterilizing microorganisms existing on the surfaces of and within the peppers;

first and second hot air dryers or a freeze dryer for drying the sterilized peppers; and

15 a grinder for grinding the dried peppers into a final product, wherein each unit of the apparatus is connected by a conveyer.

14. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising a deep-freeze reservoir for storing the fresh peppers, aged peppers, cut peppers, or peppers dried by the first dryer.

20 15. The apparatus of claim 13, further comprising:

a laser foreign material detector and separator for detecting and separating foreign materials from the dried peppers before grinding by the grinder;

an iron particle separator for separating iron particles from the peppers after grinding by the grinder; and

25 a wrapper.